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ABSTRACT

Over the last 10 years, French television's Institute of Audiovisual Communication (INA) has shifted from modernist to post-modernist practice in broadcasting in a series of innovative audiovisual magazine programs about communication, and in a series of longer "compilation" documentaries. The first of INA's audiovisual magazines, "Hieroglyphes," was produced in 1975. Primarily a visual collage, the one-hour weekly program consisted of a series of 10- to 12-minute self-contained, authored films, each with a brief voice-over explaining its provenance, but no linking of disparate items. "Rue des Archives," which followed two years later, was made on video, with individual directors constructing essays entirely from archival materials. The result was a highly impressionistic series of montages. In the third series, "Juste une Image," INA continued its evolution toward a cultivation of the image for its own sake by emphasizing video effects and dispensing with commentary. Materials used in the series included video art, film-makers' work in progress, archival photographs, television from other countries, animation and other special effects, "hieroglyphic" moments from the television archives, and classic cinematic moments. The evolution of INA's audiovisual magazines manifested various shifts in broadcasting technology, in cultural production, in theory, and in aesthetics. Thirty-two end notes/references are listed. (CGD)

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TOWARDS POSTMODERNIST TELEVISION:

IWA's Audiovisual Magazine Programmes

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Paper presented to the
International Television Studies Conference
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INA'S Audiovisual Magazine Programmes

by Susan Boyd-Bowman

ITSC, 1986

INTRODUCTION

"Imagine a galaxy containing two quite different worlds. In the first, the relations of power and knowledge are so ordered that priority and precedence are given to written and spoken language over "mere (idolatrous) imagery."... In the second world--a much larger planet--the hierarchical ranking of word and image has been abolished. Truth--insofar as it exists at all--is first and foremost pictured: embodied in images which have their own power and effects.... It is not the function of language here to explain the origins of the Image, its functions or effects, still less its meaning(s) (which, as they are plural, are not worth talking about). In this world, the vertical axis has collapsed and the organisation of sense is horizontal (i.e. this world is a flat world.)"

--Dick Hebdige'

It is the aim of this paper to examine the "flat world" evolved in the *ateliers* of French television's Institute for Audiovisual Communication, INA. Over the last ten years, in a series of innovative audiovisual magazine programmes about communication (and in a series of longer "compilation" documentaries which challenge the transparency of archival material), INA has traversed a shift from modernist to post-modernist practice in broadcasting. While much attention has been given to post-modernism as the cultural dominant within such forms as rock music, advertising, video art, and style magazines, very little has been written about its manifestations in national broadcast television.

Amongst state-funded broadcasting organisations, INA is in the unusual situation of having both responsibility for the French audiovisual archives, and a specific brief to produce creative and experimental productions for the national networks. The conception it first adopted was of "memory as a source of creativity," with the audiovisual a firm part of the national heritage. This patrimony was put at the disposal of a host of film-makers recruited from the cinematic and video avant-gardes, whose work was influenced by the fermenting French intellectual climate. The waning of a modernist belief in communication has occurred amidst simultaneous cataclysms in the political economy of French television, culminating in the recent expansion and deregulation of television channels.

Fredric Jameson describes the energetic texts of late capitalism as embodying advanced communications technology to mesmerise the audience

with sheer technique of representation itself: a rocketing into "postmodern hyperspace."² The challenge to official culture veers toward the abolition of history, narrative and ideology.

The more recent work done by INA raises interesting questions about attempts to disrupt the discourses of French public service broadcasting and to problematise its concepts of popular memory, cultural heritage, and authorship. The collages transmitted under *Juste une Image* contest the literary values and signifying practices which predominate elsewhere on television. They break down the demarcation between high art and popular culture, for example. But they also represent a trend toward fetishisation of the Image, a post-modernist play that is less interested in what its original materials may once have meant, or signify to viewers today than in the radical subjectivity of the text. INA represents its output as a resolution of "the apparent contradiction between culture and commerce," while acknowledging the charge of "elitist intellectualism".³

L'INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA COMMUNICATION AUDIOVISUELLE

INA was formed in 1975, as a consequence of the split-up of ORTF, the French national broadcasting organisation, into six new *sociétés*. The legend is that INA was a mistake, an afterthought in the form of an amendment to the 1974 Television Act which swept together various activities which had been previously overlooked. Experimentation was written into the bill at the eleventh hour by a senator who didn't wish to see French television lose the "unique experiment" constituted by the old Service de la Recherche at ORTF. It was also designated the repository of the nation's audiovisual archives. INA's unique combination of functions was born amidst the break-up of the Gaullist consensus which had sustained the legitimacy of the ORTF monopoly. French state broadcasting had shared with the BBC a mission of public service to the nation. The objectives of the reform of 1975 were to introduce better management and financial accountability, to end what the Government considered the ideologically tendentious nature of much programme output, and to create a series of bodies which would deal flexibly with the anticipated changes in mass media technology. In

effect, it ended the vertical integration within the state channels, and hived off production from programming.

The relations between INA and the rest of French television are covered by articles of legislation, in terms of quality and quantity. The three companies--T.F.1, Antenne 2 and F.R.3--normally broadcast each year about 30 hours of programmes produced by I.N.A. itself using its own finance ("specific production"), and another 30 hours in which I.N.A.'s contribution is purely financial ("contractual production").

Its role is that of an experimental producer, with a mandate to seek both public and private partners, in France and abroad. The brief was to use fresh talent, to invent new modes of television expression, and to apply new techniques (e.g. computer animation.) The mid-70s were not an auspicious period for audiovisual experimentation: invention was disappearing from the cinematographic domain; there was a decline in independent film-making; and the networks were concerned with "viability," and would soon be reluctant to transmit the minimum hours of INA output vouchsafed by statute.

A French law of July 1982 conferred on INA responsibility for 50 years of sound and radio archives, 35 years of television archives, and 30 years of cinema newsreels. (In total, some 2 million items are stored on floppy disk, film, and tape.) This law confers on INA title to works produced and broadcast by French television from five years after their first transmission. The archives now contain some 500,000 broadcasts and documentaries, that is, about 520,000 hours of potential programmes. The archives are used by the television companies, as repeats, inserts or extracts in montage films, amounting to 140 hours of programme material per month. These were also the raw materials with which INA began to produce its own series.

Meanwhile I.N.A. embarked on an adventurous film production policy, supervised by Manette Bertin, who had belonged to the ORTF's Service de la Recherche, and who sought co-productions to finance work by an impressive roster of film-makers. In the 70's she foresaw the breakdown of the distinctions between cinema and television, and amongst

genres. She saw the role of her division as voluntarily marginalised on the frontiers of television, inventing prototypes for the rest of television by bringing *inauteurs* from outside. INA applied to television production the same *auteurism* as had obtained in the cinema; the organisation would allow directors to assert their creative autonomies, whatever the risks. There was no necessary contradiction between creativity and public taste. To a suggestion from *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1981 that INA's idea of experimentation was overly intellectual, Bertin replied that "this very *dirigisme* is illusory because the image never says what you want to make it say. It has its own discourse." But after the success of getting Godard's *Six fois Deux* on FR3 in 1976, the climate changed, as the channels were now permitted their own production capacity. Bertin found they were now less keen on INA'S perceived hermeticism:

I've never seen the channels gladly accept experimental programmes except in the last couple of years, when, in order to open up a situation that had become deadlocked, INA asked the channels what they wanted for it and scrupulously did it. Then everybody was happy: the channels, the board of INA, and our political masters. Everything was peaceful, nobody was making waves. But that conception of INA's role - the cultural alibi, stripped of its meaning - leads straight to the death of a research department, which shouldn't be expected to produce either familiar objects, or nicely finished products, but what the others don't do: films in which different preoccupations appear, in which questions are raised.⁵

A populist retrenchment occurred in the early 1980's, though INA's corporate identity was somewhat enhanced by the Socialist victory of 1981 and the 1982 creation of a Haute Commission for broadcasting. INA's President Jacques Pomonti made a statement in 1983:

"INA has no intention of becoming a refuge for the kind of elitist intellectualism which would considerably restrict its potential audience. All experimentation and creative activity runs this risk and INA has sometimes succumbed in the past. ... We intend to respect all television as a means of mass communication which appeals to everyone, this will require constant mediation in order for what we do to be accessible to the greatest number... A deliberate attempt to simplify or talk down on the grounds that this makes for accessible programming merely shows contempt for the viewer and should be avoided by television. But it is also true that to speak in the coded jargon of privileged minorities whilst completely ignoring the tastes and abilities of the television viewer shows an equal contempt for that viewer and we ought also to avoid doing so."

Basically INA experimentalism shifted from the modernist avant-garde, in terms of its preoccupations with style, authorship, didacticism, to postmodern commodification of the image. I will try to trace this evolution across the three major audiovisual magazine series produced between 1975 and 1983.

HIEROGLYPHES

Hiéroglyphes was the first audiovisual magazine to be produced by INA. Magazine programmes had enjoyed a vogue in the heyday of French television: the pioneer had been the current affairs magazine *Cinq colonnes à la une* in 1960; but the mid-sixties saw the advent of programmes which gave space to the counter-culture (*Zoom*), the women's movement (*Dim-Dam-Dum*) and youth (*Seize mille jeunes*). But a year after INA's creation, *Hiéroglyphes* was the first magazine which showcased archive material. The first episode, transmitted on Sunday 28 September 1975 at 20:30 on FR3, was greeted with a feature in France's most popular TV magazine. Viewers who tuned in would have seen well-known TV journalist Roger Louis (who had been sacked in '68) seated amongst a cluster of folding director's chairs, smoking furiously as he explained the rationale for the monthly series devoted to the image. The title is evidently an allusion to a 1973 essay by Roland Barthes ("*Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein*") in which he defines the term *hieroglyph* as a fragment "in which can be read at a single glance...the present, the past, and the future; that is, the historical meaning of the represented action...The pregnant moment is just this presence of all the absences (memories, lessons, promises) to whose rhythm History becomes both intelligible and desirable." Barthes is concerned with history and representation ("outside of the gest, there is only vagueness, insignificance"), but he describes (à propos of the use of tableaux in Eisenstein) what could be seen as characteristic of INA's later magazines: "a contiguity of episodes, each one absolutely meaningful, aesthetically perfect, and the result is a cinema by vocation anthological, itself holding out to the fetishist, with dotted lines, the piece for him to cut out and take away to enjoy...No image is

boring."⁶ The press sheet summarises Roger Louis' to-camera introduction:

"Why **HIEROGLYPHES**? Three thousand years before our era, the Egyptians in the age of the pharaoh refined a writing system given to multiple significations founded on the juxtaposition of images representing elements of reality: hieroglyphs. Today images and sounds invade our daily universe. Are these audiovisual signs the hieroglyphs of our civilisation? We have chosen to tackle this huge theme by means of a mosaic of subjects, which are both responses and propositions bearing on each other, on men and on techniques, while confronting the past and the future of the audiovisual... A means of expression as well as of social communication, audiovisual language must still be decoded. It is **HIEROGLYPHES**' ambition to contribute to that end by *giving back to the public a taste for the image which traditional television and the commercial cinema have perhaps occluded.* (my translation and emphasis) "We were the very first to decipher the image," co-producer Louisette

Neil commented to Jill Forbes in 1984.⁷ **Hieroglyphes** (made on film in 1975/6) demonstrates the main principles of the audio-visual magazine which would be carried on in the video series **Rue des Archives** and **Juste une Image**:

- 1) a celebration of authorship; each item will be "signed" by the *réalisateur* who made it;
- 2) the etiolation of the presenter, and eventually of written or spoken commentary to situate the items in relation to each other;
- 3) an eclecticism in the selection of material (spanning the entire history of film and television, the popular and the avant-garde, the foreign and the domestic, etc.) enabled by the liberalism of the archive policy;
- 4) the emphasis on subjectivity in form: an aversion to anything which fits within the norms of television.

Hiéroglyphes went out on FR3 on Sunday evenings, once a month. Thierry Garrel, the producer responsible for all three series under discussion, commented:

The channel thought the slot wasn't worth bothering about because there was a film on the other side, but we used to get 3% of the audience... What was important was that people noticed it, and it was talked about in professional circles, among TV people. They were interested in the fact that it was a new kind of programme and also that it looked at images in a non-technical or non-professional way, at the aesthetics, sociology, history, etc. of images. Mind you, when we looked at **Hiéroglyphes** after having done **Juste une Image** we really felt there was too much talk in it, partly because there was sometimes a commentary, but also because **Hiéroglyphes** was much more didactic than

Juste une Image, even though this didn't show at the time in comparison with what else was going out on television.¹⁰

John Ellis points out that the magazine format of items running 10 to 12 minutes in a programme of one hour, has now become common on French television (it would be used for Antenne-2's Cinema, Cinémas beginning in 1981), and remarks that the "advantage of the formula is its consistent possibilities for surprise, both in the nature of the material that can be shown, and in the possibilities for startling juxtapositions".¹⁰ The dethronement of verbal language in favour of the pleasures of visual collage, rarely experienced on British television, became the hallmark of INA's magazine programmes.

The "hieroglyphs" of the 1975 French TV series were self-contained, authored, short films, and it was left to the linking segments to foreground the materiality of the image. To music reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann, we see a cameraman focussing and de-focussing the words written on a mirror; each title is shown in positive and negative mode; and the segments also quote Vertov in representing strips of celluloid. A typical edition contains five items: No. 3's menu consists of "Magazitrone," a proto-typical "scratch" treatment of the most famous presenter on French television, Léon Zitrone; extracts from Godard's NUMERO DEUX; a montage of 1914-18 "autochromes" (a colour glass-plate photographic method invented by the Lumières) alongside early recorded music and readings from a military chronicle of the First World War; "The Birds of Illic," a dramatically shot natural history sequence of an owl attacking a crow's nest; and finally, "Luca Ronconi: from the stage to the screen," a record of the television adaptation of an avant-garde production of "Orlando Furioso." There is no pretense of linking these disparate items, apart from the notion of "machinery" attached to the two media men, Zitrone and Godard. On the other hand, each short film has at least a brief voice-over introduction explaining its provenance, and the "Autochromes" piece, in validating its three elements of image, music and text as "taken from the archives," lays claim to trying to recreate the past.

RUE DES ARCHIVES

Two years after *Hiéroglyphes* had expired the same producers launched a format in which individual directors were asked to construct essays from archive materials. *Rue des Archives* was made on video, and unlike *Hiéroglyphes* before it or *Juste une Image* after, it relied entirely on television archive material, rather than mixing found with commissioned work. The result was a highly impressionistic series of montages. To quote from INA'S translated press release for the first series of six in 1978:

"Named after the Paris street housing the National Archives, this series is exclusively composed of extracts from the archives of French television and provides the audience with an opportunity of strolling around that vast collective memory.

Departing from the conventional classifications according to genres, specific themes, historical periods, it gives these documents a different dimension and a new resonance.

The first six programmes of the RUE DES ARCHIVES series are original essays in which the authors/film-makers confront - according to their personal vision - striking and singular moments from television's past. While the emotion of the rediscovered images is preserved, reflection is also suscitated [sic] (whether amused or nostalgic) on the reality of television yesterday and today."

The formula was refined in the 1979 series of six, which covered the themes of love, destiny, children, French history, and spectacle--all as represented on television. Numbers 4 and 5 were called "Un Petit Manuel d'Histoire de France," and were directed by the exiled Chilean filmmaker Raul Ruiz.

Ruiz was interviewed by Cahiers in 1981:

"INA was interested in developing relations between the cinema and television, and so tried to bring to television some auteurs, people who had a distinctive approach. ..At the time they wanted to call on foreign auteurs (there were Terayama, Angelopolous, etc.) I realised that they considered us as authors, as a little apart from the others."¹²

Garrel was producing *Rue des Archives* at the time, and proposed the subject of French History to Ruiz: "It was a matter of editing serials and historical dramas, putting them in chronological order, and showing the History of France as television saw it," from the Gauls to the invention of the cinema, often intercutting between several versions of the same episode, as in the sequence about Jeanne d'Arc, in which five different actresses interpret the character. Whereas other Rue directors chose to montage discrete sequences, Ruiz attempted to juxtapose images within the frame:

"I wanted to take into account the multiplicity of interpretations of History and I had the idea of making a film with two bands of images in parallel. I showed two (and sometimes three) films at a time, which I could mix at the last minute on video by a simple wipe passing between one and another, in such a manner that you could feel that while you were watching one event there were others happening. Not just different versions of the same events, but events in parallel."¹³

Ruiz began by viewing programmes and studying history textbooks, and found in them very strong stereotypes. As Jameson commented on "la mode rétro," it seemed as if we were "condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which remains forever out of reach."¹⁴

"I saw that these stereotypes were used by directors of the Right as well as the Left. An historian friend helped me to understand that these stereotypes had their origin in the nineteenth century... All of French History was that of the formation of the State and all moral discussion in these films bore on that theme. Most of the films I saw-- what we call "the Buttes-Chaumont school"--were in effect bits of the same discourse. Everything that works for the centralised state, no matter what the means employed, is good, and everything against it is bad. ..For that reason I chose to work with the actual school-texts (four manuals running from the end of C19 to 1968) and to have them read by children of from eight to sixteen years old, girls. I adopted the idea of having them read these texts for the first time...Then I played with these three elements: the double image, the *maladroit* readings of the schoolbooks, and the very stereotypical *mise-en-scène* of the history of the formation of the State."¹⁵

The element of parody in "Le Petit Manuel," which consists entirely of these quotations from television plays and re-enactments of French history, is the digital date of the given event which appears in the upper-right corner of frame, and the pedantic labeling of each extract. The proliferation of stereotypical representations reaches a subversive pitch when Ruiz gets to Napoleon, and follows a clip from Gance's *Napoléon* with his own frenetic montage of shots from the preceding parts of the programme, what Rosenbaum describes as "a helter-skelter heap of near-subliminal flashes, one shot per era, which effectively reduces all French history to a hysterical flood of incoherent clichés."¹⁶ The problem with Ruiz's "Short History of France" is similar to one pinpointed by Thomas Elsaesser in his interview with Edgardo Cozarinsky, the maker of *La Guerre d'un Seul Homme* (INA, 1981): the spectator cannot orient him or herself within the text.¹⁷ Ruiz's thesis about the formation of the State implies a logic to the radical heterogeneity of

clips which I suspect is not evident even to a French viewer, and the sole basis for our perspective is simple irony. The depthlessness of this particular series of the four Rue des Archives seasons is encapsulated in the title of the following week's audiovisual essay, "La Vie est une Spectacle," a montage of clips from non-fiction television which "offer the public privileged moments of a "hyper-real" world where one can read the signs of a society and an era."

JUSTE UNE IMAGE

The title of the third audiovisual magazine produced by INA comes from Godard's famous maxim: "Ce n'est pas une image juste, c'est juste une image" ("This is not a just image, it's just an image") formulated during his Dziga Vertov period. MacCabe's gloss on it in his 1980 book is that Godard "insists on the fact that no image has a life of its own outside the institutions which exist to fix its meanings... 'in every image we must know who speaks'---thus Godard, and this imperative demands that we uncover the terms of address in the cinema, the terms in which we are constructed as spectators".¹⁶ For INA, on the contrary, the new series represented a shift from the hermeneutic and ideological to the bricolage of fragments; it continued an evolution away from didacticism, and towards a cultivation of the image for its own sake. Commentary was dispensed with; the stylistic emphasis was on video effects. The titles were abstract and elliptical: a hammer raised, lowered, and finally shattering an invisible pane of glass, a close-up of a baby's eyes, the materialisation of the series title in a frame of electric blue. (The earlier two series's titles had notional human points-of-view: the cameraman of *Hieroglyphes* or the promenade through the Rue des Archives.) Producer Thierry Garrel:

"What one can say is that JUSTE UNE IMAGE was not called that for nothing, and that it talked about television, about the cinema, about early photography, about ethnography, but that all these things were approached obliquely, and the idea was to take all aspects of the image and juxtapose them... What you could perhaps say is that there is a reason why INA should have produced a magazine programme of this kind, because INA occupies a key position in the audiovisual field, and brings together foreign film-makers, a commitment to research, the development of television policy, technical progress, etc., etc., so we really are centrally placed and this gives us a vantage point which allows us to

have a more general view of the image. So that in HIEROGLYPHES and even more in JUSTE UNE IMAGE our individual and collective experience resulted in a sort of *imaginary cinémathèque*, in which we include many things which we've noticed in our day to day work and which have struck us as interesting."¹⁹

Garrel and Neil go on to explain the differences from *Hiéroglyphes*, which was also made up of discrete items ("one subject - fade; the next subject - fade, and so on") but which did not strive for the effect of *bricolage*:

"JUSTE UNE IMAGE was much more complex because every number was a work in its own right and we were much more interested in the combination of the different elements within each number. So what we were working on was the relations between images and the ways one image might recall or prefigure another, in which a relation might, for example, be established between an image from the early years of cinema and something ultra-modern and contemporary. And I think the idea was also to give the viewer more work to do, and to let him make the connections in his head-between one image and another."²⁰

In conversation with me, Garrel spoke of the "secret order" in which items were juxtaposed, along a matrix of binary oppositions (between mono and colour, TV and cinema, sound and silence, old and new, etc.), and also of using the "normal" to hammock the "experimental". Here is how the producers described the series in the publicity material:

"JUSTE UNE IMAGE is a poetic excursion into the world of today's and tomorrow's images, with its fashions and techniques, its debates, its secrets, its dangers, its magic and its seduction. It is a mosaic of points of view about images from here and elsewhere. It takes a look at other people's television and reflects on our own. It also looks at new images created by computers and video, as well as experimental cinema and at photography, which still has an essential role to play in our world of moving images. JUSTE UNE IMAGE invites you to discover, to criticise, to understand, and to come to terms with the how and why of images..."

Each of the numbers of *Juste une Image* consisted of from seven to a dozen sequences of varying lengths. Of the total of over sixty items, only a third were of French origin (including shorts from INA on research into the image), and the rest foreign, representing a cosmopolitan selection of the video avant-garde; half were "original" (including items made by manipulating found material) and rights to transmit the other half had to be bought. The major categories of material that made up the series as a whole were:

1. video art

2. film-makers' work in progress
3. presentation of archival photographs
4. television from other countries
5. animation and other special effects
6. "hieroglyphic" moments from the television archives
7. classic cinematic moments, particularly self-reflexive ones

So, for example, No. 7 begins with an extract from Vertov's *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA*, prefaced by nothing more than the caption "1929" (when shown as part of *Hieroglyphes* five years before, the Vertov extract had been mediated by a presentation to camera by Henri Langlois, Director of the Cinémathèque); a voice-over intervenes at one point with some propositions about the montage principle. But it is for the viewer to decide whether these propositions have intertextual status. Number 7 does have a notional unifying theme: cities round the world (in addition to Moscow, we will get Cairo, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Paris, Baghdad, and New York. But this theme does not constrain the selection:

"Introduction to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee" is tangential at best, since it consists of a reading of that book's preface in which Agee (as the programme notes put it) "challenges the very notion of documentary, what he calls 'this obscene and terrifying work' and denounces the misuse of the camera, 'the central instrument of our times.'" Although the piece begins with a clip from Pare Lorentz's *THE RIVER*, and uses one or two of Walker Evans's photos, archive material is largely eschewed. The reading is stylised: in a high-rise apartment we see a man (Robert Kramer) listening to a tape and performing what appears to be a simultaneous translation in American-accented French. Time passes between one passage and another, and occasionally phrases are superimposed (e.g. "journalisme honnête") and the camera wanders off to the Paris skyline outside the window.

This video piece was directed by Pierre Beuchot who will shortly be making *LE TEMPS DETRUIT*, a feature-length documentary about the 1940 phase of the war made from the personal letters of three soldiers (who happened to be prominent intellectuals), their family photos, and contemporary colour film of wartime landscapes, to evoke that tragic period before France fell to the Germans. This television documentary, like much of the other INA compilations about the war, belongs to a tradition of poetic realism going back to Resnais' *NUIT ET BROUILLARD*.

Beuchot's item for *Juste* No. 7, on the contrary, is anti-realist, and harnesses Agee as critic to that aesthetic. It should also be noted, given the producers' concern with juxtapositions, that the Agee reading is hampered between "In the Street," a humanist record of the slums of New York on which he collaborated in 1946 with Helen Lewitt, and "Mistaken Memories of Medieval Manhattan," by Brian Eno, which uses the television screen vertically to give a disturbed vision of the Manhattan skyline (a vertical roller caption instructs us to turn our television sets sideways!)

No. 7 is also notable for the item "Small Screens in Cairo" directed by Philippe Grandrieux, who became the co-producer of *Juste une Image*:

Egypt: 45 million inhabitants, 20 million television viewers, but only 3 million televisions. In among the streets of Cairo, on a butcher's slab, behind a tinker's stall, in the dark corridor of a café, small screens broadcast fragments of programmes...An impressionistic picture, without commentary, of television elsewhere from the point of view of those who look at it....

But is the identification with Egyptian spectators? The item makes use of a technique to be developed in the *Mine de Rien* series of video postcards (and which corresponds to a trend in video art to much shorter items which trade on a touristic discourse) in which postcard views of a city are momentarily animated with appropriate sound effects. In the Cairo sequence, it is the television screen within these snapshots of urban backstreets which is momentarily animated, producing surreal juxtapositions: for example, an advertisement for make-up appears on a TV screen perched on the roof of a car standing in front of the Pyramids. Occasionally there is a cut to the television programme thus framed, and the Grandrieux piece concludes with a montage of Egyptian TV clips, the facts about spectatorship vs. ownership mentioned above, and a sample of the Koran readings which punctuate the daily transmission. But the point of view, insofar as it is possible to find one, is that of the Westerner marvelling at the contradiction between what is shown and the viewing situation of those shown watching; the perspective is firmly within the Orientalist tradition.²²

Grandrieux was also working on *Pleine Lune*, the unique three hours of airtime that INA was given in August 1983, and which proved a major

incursion of INA's current avant-garde practice onto A-2. He had learned video production in Brussels and commented in an interview reprinted in INA's dossier Quelle Recherche: Quelle Création?:

"The series Juste une image gave me a better acquaintance with the new technologies, and the opportunity to try out different forms of writing. We made two montage sequences on the television of Japan and of Mexico. We wanted to present Egyptian television, but I hoped to bring in another dimension: television in the course of being watched.... The ensemble didn't cost very much, and was a completely new fashion of producing... One can ask if this progress is worthwhile. At one extreme, one can still make 16mm films in black and white without the slightest effect [trucage]. No video clip has given me the emotion I felt watching LE CHIEN ANDALOU by Buñuel. But television is our era, another era, and the person who would work in it must take on the new technologies.²³

No. 6 was radically different in content: a montage of a day's transmission of Antenne 2 ("Cadavres Exquis sur A2: Une Journée à la Chaîne" by Gérard Patris) which uses scratch techniques (repetition, jumpcuts, synthesised images) to stitch together clips from television shown on Friday 24 September 1982, from 11 a.m. to midnight. A digital clock in the corner of the frame records the time of day. To further complicate the montage, the programme is interspersed with a few "parasites:" pieces of video art, mostly American, such as Joan Logue's "Advertisements for Artists." So, overlaid with the deconstruction of mainstream television is a flaunting of oppositional practice. Thus a witty re-editing of Apostrophes, the intellectual chat-show, in which the sound is suppressed in favour of foregrounding the participants' body language, is interrupted by "T-Women," a video of lesbian love-making by an experimental German film-maker. (Garrel remarked to me that they now acknowledge that these art video "parasites" were superfluous to the programme.)

VIDEO MAGAZINES

The Garrel press release notes that the magazine was made on video, "contributing thus to raising the status of a strand of production neglected by INA, and often considered as less trustworthy because less well understood and equipped." Juste une image can be seen as part of the incorporation of video art into broadcast television, a guerilla

movement being waged within other national broadcasting organisations, like BRT and RTB (the Dutch and French companies in Belgium, which produce the series *Dienst Kunstzaden* and *Vidéographie*, respectively), and others featured in INA's *Quelle recherche, quelle création?*. It is possible, however, to discern an aesthetic prejudice within *Juste in* favour of cinema against television (an editorial line put by Fellini in a rare interview clip); viz. the reverential use of clips from films by Dreyer, Vertov, Eustache, reminders of the golden era before the "mental-pollution" threatened by television. Video art, as we see in No. 6, comes to the rescue by restoring the hallucinatory properties of the Image.

The booklet *VIDEO: The state of the Art* which accompanied two seasons on Britain's Channel Four discusses the international network for distribution for the work of videomakers, and quotes Carl Loeffler's predictions that television will become the major arena for video artists and that "a Television Art" will emerge, a synthesis of existing popular forms and creative experimentation. The assumption is that proliferating channels will allow greater audience choice and strategies of narrow-casting, which will open up opportunities for innovative programmes. Loeffler:

"Somewhere in the near future, artists will have the opportunity to fully implement a populist television art. Till then, however, they will continue to inflate the ranks of the industry by producing singular works and series concepts, and assisting in assembling current and future commercial TV programmes."²⁴

Though he's writing in an American context, Loeffler's prediction seems to be coming true amongst European state broadcasting. *The Ghost in the Machine* on C4 featured some American video art also shown on *Juste une Image*, as well as some items from INA itself. The question is whether this international television art can be considered "populist," or is rather a cultivation of technical complexity and audiovisual fragmentation for their own sakes, a product of "the obscure desire towards extra sophistication,"²⁵ and addressed to an élite fragment of the national audience.

POSTMODERN TELEVISION

"Artificial Insanity": the title of a Belgian TV project is a useful catchphrase for the post-modern aesthetic. Dick Hebdige at a recent cultural studies conference²⁶ made a lightning sketch of what he called the "post-Everything" crisis:

...the collapse of the didactic mode of address; the re-working of relations between high and low cultures; the re-distribution of knowledge by means of private communications technology; the eclipsing of traditional intellectual formations and the institutions that support them; the commodification of culture and information, a schizoid mode in which the subject is a pure screen for networks of influence (intellectual but not affective); [resulting in:] the reliance on electronic simulation, an obsession with pastiche and parody, the triumph of the signifier in a profusion of depthless surfaces, etc. [I paraphrase a polemic delivered in very post-modernist style!]

The sketch applies very well to *Juste une Image*, though in fact Hebdige's analysis of the postmodern world, quoted at the beginning of this paper, was centred on the magazine *The Face*. Here is a quote from its Disinformation Special on "The End of Politics:" "Classless society, social justice--no-one believes in them any more. We're in the age of micro-narratives, the art of the fragment."²⁷

Hebdige goes on to describe how the artful fragments that make up the copy of *The Face* flatten out the world:

..Flatness is corrosive and infectious.. . In the land'of the gentrified cut-up, as in the place of dreams, anything imaginable can happen, anything at all.²⁸

INA's audiovisual magazine programmes, what Garrel would call the "imaginary cinémathèques" (and what Hebdige might call "designer TV programmes") work on the premises that while no image is boring, none is better than another, unless passed through the creative sensibilities of a real *auteur*, and that there is no necessary link between the chains of signifiers late-night on Antenne-2 and the social world. The technology of reproduction replaces the politics of representation.

Here in Britain, where this kind of avant-garde is much more marginalised than on the Continent, a reaction had already set in. Photographer and critic Victor Burgin writes in the recent issue of *Block* on postmodernism:

"Moral certainty and political necessity is not, of itself, dissolved in the 'restless flux' of postmodernism's 'anything goes.'"

Juste une Image (and some of INA's commissions of that same period) seems to interrogate itself to the end of intelligibility, "challenging all forms of presentation in its drive to impart a sense of the unrepresentable", as John Tagg described the goal of postmodernism?³⁰ Resistance or nihilism? As has been observed in a similar context, one's opinion of the evolution of INA's innovations in audiovisual programming depends on whether you're a pessimist or a radical. I would argue that while much video innovation is more symptomatic of the international communications market than subversive of it, the very fact of its being transmitted on television raises crucial questions about the implosion of the media and about the function of the intelligentsia in dominant institutions: opposition or incorporation? INA's audiovisual magazines are only one part of its output, but are being shown at media festivals around the world and formed a season at London's National Film Theatre earlier this year.³¹ I am arguing that their evolution manifests various shifts: in broadcasting technology from film to video, in cultural production from auteurism to bricolage, in theory from Barthes to Baudrillard, in aesthetics from style to simulacra. If "the image has become the final form of commodity reification,"³² INA is sitting on the postmodern gilt market. It will be interesting to see whether two of its current projects, an international co-production on propaganda images, and a national one on the Fifties as seen through the mythologies of Roland Barthes, return those images to the world of social relations, and turn their viewers to face backwards, like Benjamin's angel of history, or leave them gazing at the flat screen.

END

FOOTNOTES and REFERENCES:

1. Dick Hebdige "The Bottom Line on Planet One," in Ten-8, no. 19, 1985, p.41.
2. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Capitalism," New Left Review no. 146 (July/August 1984), p. 87.
3. Jacques Pomonti, President of INA, Statement of October 1983, quoted in Jill Forbes, INA - French for Innovation, BFI 1984 (Dossier 22), p. 2.
2. This dossier is my major source for information on the history of INA.
4. Amongst the film-makers commissioned by INA were: Rivette, Godard, Marker, Duras, Ivens, Pialat, Allio, Straub/Huillet, Angelopolous, Syberberg, Cozarinsky...
5. "Entretien avec Manette Bertin," by Serge Le Péron and Serge Toubiana, Cahiers du Cinéma TV supplement, 1981, and quoted in Forbes (1984) p. 11.
6. Pomonti, in Forbes (1984), p. 2.
7. Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," in Image, Music, Text, edited by Stephen Heath (Fontana, 1977). The essay is dedicated to film-maker André Techiné, who would also be commissioned by INA.
8. Ibid, p. 72.
9. Louisette Neil, in Forbes (1984) p. 19.
10. Thierry Garrel, in Forbes (1984), p. 19.
11. John Ellis, "Is it Really Just an Image?" in Forbes (1984) p. 35.
12. "Entretien avec Raoul Ruiz," by Serge Daney, Cahiers du Cinéma TV Supplement, 1981, p. 41.
13. Ruiz, Ibid, p. 41.
14. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Postmodern Culture, edited by Hal Foster (Pluto, 1985) p. 118.
15. Ruiz, op cit., p. 41.
16. Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Mapping the Territory of Raul Ruiz," Monthly Film Bulletin Vol. 52 No. 612 (January 1985), p. 8.
17. Thomas Elsaesser, "Interview with Edgardo Cozarinsky," Framework no. 21 (Summer 1983), p.21.
18. Colin McCabe, Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics, BFI 1980, p. 111.
19. Garrel, in Forbes (1984) p. 19.

20. Ibid., p. 19-20.
21. Channel Four has joined an INA consortium to produce a bunch of these fifteen-second fillers, under the title Mine de Rien.
22. Edward Said, Orientalism (Routledge Kegan Paul, 1978)
23. Philippe Grandrieux, in Problèmes Audiovisuels no. 17: Quelle recherche: quelle création?, INA (Paris), p. 20.
24. Loeffler, Carl, in Video: The State of the Art, Channel Four, 1985,
25. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "On the Sublime," in Post-modernism edited by Lisa Appignanesi, Institute of Contemporary Arts (London) 1986, p. 10.
26. Dick Hebdige, paper at the Association for Cultural Studies Conference, Northeast London Polytechnic, 21-23 March 1986.
27. Paul Virilio, in The Face, quoted in Hebdige, op cit., p. 42.
28. Hebdige, op cit., p. 42.
29. Victor Burgin, "Some Thoughts on Postmodernism and Outsiderism," in Block 11 (1985/6), p. 24.
30. John Tagg, "Postmodernism and the Born-Again Avant-Garde," in Block, op cit., p. 4.
31. "Back to the Future: INA Archive Production," programmed by Jill Forbes and Jon Stewart, National Film Theatre, May 1986.
32. Guy Debord, quoted in Jameson (1984), p. 66.